



Family Partner Role in Wraparound Crisis and Safety Planning

in BRIEF

Briefs are provided as a best practice reference or topic example to support communities in developing the family partner role.

INTRODUCTION

When families first come into Wraparound, things are generally not going well. This is true on multiple levels and may have been going on for a very long time. The purpose of this brief is to acquaint Wraparound teams with defining crisis from both the family and systems context, and understanding how Family Partners can be most effective in their role with families when a crisis is occurring.

HOW FAMILIES DEFINE CRISIS

The crises families experience vary from family to family. Yet the impact for each family can be significant, and need to be understood in order for Wraparound to respond effectively.

Some examples where kids and families experience crisis include, but are not limited to the following:

- *Homelessness*, or separation from family
- *Threats of harm*
- *Impact of poverty* (including job loss, lack of stable/safe housing, lack of necessary resources needed for daily living).
- *Trauma/ACE's* – past or present. It is also important to note that when there is a child, and/or other members of the family experiencing significant mental health challenges, this can also be traumatizing to other members of the family, which may result in challenging behaviors that can put the whole family into crisis.
- *Loss of family* – either through separation (divorce/separation of parents, parental incarceration, death of a family member, abuse or neglect resulting in removal from home, etc.,)
- *Repeated negative experiences of the child or children in school* (including bullying, suspension, expulsion)
- *Ongoing experiences, such as those listed above that have a significant negative impact on families.*

Families may define crisis around any of these experiences, and often times are experiencing multiple situations where any one thing can put them into a crisis. A family may define crisis as the result of dealing with high intensity behavior from one or more members of the family, which is sustained over time. In Wraparound, we often see that this is a common experience.

HOW SYSTEMS DEFINE CRISIS

Systems define crisis in a manner that is specific to the role they play in a child and family's life. While there are well meaning adults, who care a lot about children, youth, and families, they are responding to crises from a specific point of view.

As an example, a child who is behaving aggressively in school, is likely going to be sent to the principal's office, and is likely to be suspended or expelled if the behavior is serious. A child who is determined to be neglected or abused may be removed from care, and the focus of planning is around the child's safety. A child or youth who is engaging in destructive or harmful behavior may be removed from the community, and placed in a juvenile corrections facility. A child with mental health and/or substance use challenges may receive mental health treatment such as medication, therapy, skills training and even peer services to support recovery.

While systems work together to ensure that children, youth, and families can do better, it is more challenging to see crisis in the manner that families do. Once involved in multiple systems, the focus around crisis becomes more focused on eminent risk of harm.

WRAPAROUND CRISIS AND SAFETY PLANNING

In Wraparound, crisis and safety planning is an activity that the child and family team engages in at the very beginning of the Wraparound planning process and tends to be throughout the Wraparound planning process.

Families are often in crisis when they enroll in Wraparound, but not always. What is important to remember is that while things may seem very chaotic in the home – not all families are in immediate crisis. Families need to adapt in order to survive. Some families function fairly well in some very concerning circumstances. However, some families do not, and it is the focus of Wraparound to find out from the family what a crisis looks like ‘for them’.

FAMILY PARTNER ROLE IN CRISIS AND SAFETY PLANNING

Family Partners have a unique role in Wraparound, and can often help families define what crisis looks like for them.

The Family Partner can work with the Care Coordinator or Facilitator to find out 1) what crisis looks like for a family 2) understanding how this is a crisis for the family 3) understanding more about the triggers – the things that may lead up to a crisis and 4) what the family has done that works while they are in that experience, or to brainstorm with the family a list of ideas that they can use proactively to prevent the crisis. Sometimes the family may have a hard time articulating this type of information. This is where the Family Partner can use their shared lived experience to describe what this was like for them. This can help the caregiver to focus on what crisis is for their family.

The Family Partner’s role is to ensure that the parent’s voice is weaved throughout this discussion so that the team is able to come up with a Crisis and Safety Plan that can truly meet the family’s needs.

Once the family’s needs have been identified, and ideas for solutions to potential crises have been developed, then the team will develop a Crisis and Safety Plan.

The Family Partner often works closely with the family to go over the plan, and check in to see that the plan is one that will work for the family. If the family feels that their voice has not been integrated into the plan, then the Family Partner can encourage and coach the family about how to bring this back to the team, or will bring this to the team, requesting that the plan be adjusted.

PEER SUPERVISION – AN ESSENTIAL NEED FOR FAMILY PARTNERS INVOLVED IN CRISIS WORK WITH FAMILIES

Peer supervision is an essential need for Family Partners. Peer supervisors are also family members who may have been recipients of Wraparound, have worked as Family Partners/Family Peer Support Specialists and have in depth knowledge of the peer practice. This level of support is important as well in responding to crisis situations with Wraparound families.

By nature, Family Partners are passionate about helping families. When a family calls the Family Partner at 8 p.m. with a crisis, the Family Partner is likely going to respond by attending to the family’s needs.

However, in Wraparound it is the Crisis and Safety Plan that addresses how the Family Partner and other members of the team are going to respond to crisis. There may be action items that have already been identified for the Family Partner, which defines what should happen if the family calls at 8 p.m. for support with a crisis. This is important, as it empowers the family to use the plan, and gain the experience in addressing the crisis if they can.

Before a crisis occurs, the Family Partner uses their role to go through the Crisis and Safety Plan with the family. The Family Partner walks the family through each step, with different scenarios that the family has identified could be a potential crisis for them. The Family Partner may also negotiate with the family about how they can support them once a crisis occurs. They will also check in with the family throughout the crisis, offering support, and work with the family to evaluate the effectiveness of the Crisis and Safety Plan once the crisis has ended.

The Peer Supervisor, is present to support the Family Partner. The Peer Supervisor observes and coaches or supports the family partner if the Crisis and Safety plan is not being followed. The Peer Supervisor can also assess with the Family

Partner whether the family's voice and ideas were integrated into the plan, and that the strategies are incorporating these ideas.

WATCHING AND MANAGING FOR SECONDARY TRAUMA WITH FAMILY PARTNERS

The Peer Supervisor also plays a very important role, observing, and managing the impact of this crisis work on Family Partners. Because Family Partners and peers in general have this shared lived experience, they risk becoming triggered around their own trauma as well as past crises.

The Peer Supervisor regularly meets with the Family Partner to discuss the Wraparound families they are working with. However, the Peer Supervisor may also put additional structure in place outside of the supervision meeting to ensure safety, and support for the Family Partner work. Some examples of this structure include; planning around potential triggers that could put a Family Partner into crisis, having daily check-ins with the Family Partner, working closely with the Family Partner when they do become triggered, developing a safety plan if necessary, and encouraging self-care.

SOME THINGS TO AVOID:

Family Partner as Crisis Responder

Remember, the Wraparound Team is responsible to develop the Crisis and Safety Plan, integrating the voice and choice of families and youth. The tasks identified may include the Family Partner, however the overall goal is to empower the family to know what to do in a crisis situation. The Family Partner will not always be involved in the family's life. The goal is for the family to increase use of their natural supports so that this can happen effectively when they graduate from wraparound.

Blaming the Family or Family Partner if Something Goes Wrong with the Crisis and Safety Plan

Remember that 'Families Don't Fail: Plans Do'. If something doesn't go well, or if the family is not following the Crisis and Safety Plan, then the team may need to go back and revise the plan, working closely with the family to understand what is not working. If the family isn't part of the planning, then it's likely the plan will not work.

Offer Crisis Support to the Enrolled Child Only

The thing that is unique about Wraparound, is that it is intended to support the entire family. Sometimes families share that the system will not respond to their request for support if the crisis does not involve the enrolled child. Remember, when other members of the family are experiencing crisis, it may have significant impacts around the Wraparound team's ability to move through the phases of Wraparound. A good Crisis and Safety Plan will address those things that the family defines are a crisis 'for them'.

CELEBRATE SUCCESSES WITH THE FAMILY – NO MATTER HOW SMALL

It is true that success builds upon success. The work of the Wraparound team is hard. The work families are doing in Wraparound is also hard. It is important to celebrate success along the way, with families. Any progress toward the goal is worth noting and celebrating!